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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6200
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6394
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2328
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JAN 0377
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1357
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 1797
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS QUITO 000247

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ASEC PGOV PINS EC
SUBJECT: ECUADOR: DEMONSTRATORS KNOCKING DOWN CONGRESS' DOOR

REF: QUITO 00200

¶1. (U) Summary: Over 3,000 protestors supporting President Correa's proposed referendum for the creation of a national constituent assembly gathered in front of the National Congress in Quito on January 30. Hundreds broke through police barriers and stormed the Congressional building. Unconfirmed reports cited three injuries; no AmCits were involved or are likely to be targeted in future clashes. Protest leaders are calling for a continuation of demonstrations until Congress blesses the referendum. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Making their voices heard in the most aggressive fashion to date, more than 3,000 supporters of President Correa's proposed national constituent assembly gathered outside the National Congress in Quito on January 30 as the Congress was in session deliberating over the assembly statutes. The rally was led by members of the radical leftist Popular Democracy Movement (MPD), campesino indigenous organization (FENOCIN) and an ad-hoc selection of pro-assembly social groups, including Correa's PAIS movement supporters.

¶3. (U) Hundreds managed to breach the barricades and enter the Congress chamber, interrupting debate and causing members to flee. The police responded with tear gas. A journalist was caught in the fray and sustained minor injuries. Two policemen also received minor injuries according to unconfirmed reports. No AmCits were affected by the protest. Similar but smaller pro-assembly demonstrations took place in Guayaquil and Cuenca.

¶4. (U) Protestors are expected to regroup this evening at 1800 in two city parks, and have vowed to continue their protests until Congress approves the controversial referendum proposal. Members of Congress have reportedly been seeking to regroup in a Quito hotel to resume debate on the assembly.

¶5. (U) Today's demonstration follows last week's break-in at the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) (reftel). Demonstrators successfully interrupted proceedings of that institution before it referred the issue of the referendum's legality to the Congress.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Today's demonstration marks another attempt by pro-government, pro-assembly supporters to exert pressure on democratic institutions from the streets, in classic Ecuadorian tradition. Popular frustration with congress was compounded by an ill-timed decision (announced on January 29) by Congress' administrative committee to raise congressional salaries above Correa's, after Correa took office cutting his own salary in half. The anti-assembly opposition has accused the government of orchestrating the protests, citing Correa's January 27 weekly radio address rallying public support for the referendum. Ironically, a majority of congress is prepared to approve the statutes authorizing the assembly, if they can proceed with their session - although the

more radical pro-assembly forces do not recognize congressional approval as a necessary step in the process.

¶6. (SBU) We will issue a warden message warning AmCits to exercise caution and avoid the protests.

JEWELL